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THE CHANGE

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ESSAYS ON THE LAND

BY

G. C. HESELTINE

WITH A FOREWORD BY

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TO
STEWART JOHN BLACK

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G. C. H.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	9
THE CHANGE	15
TWO IRISH PEACHES	20
THE SMITH	22
THE VILLAGE CARPENTER	27
SMALL-OWNERSHIP IN PRACTICE.—I	29
SMALL-OWNERSHIP IN PRACTICE.—II	33
SMALL-OWNERSHIP IN PRACTICE.—III	37
THE PASSING OF PETER	41
FEEDING OURSELVES	44
THE HERETIC	50
THE SCYTHE	53
OPEN LETTER TO THE HOUSE OF LORDS	58
THE OLD LADY IN CRINOLINES	61
THE SECOND SPRING	64
THE SERGEANT	66
THE FIRST FROST	72
THE NEW FARMER	74
THE FARMER'S BOY	77
AT "THE GOLDEN POT"	80
THE SIMPLE LIFE	85
THE VILLAGE	88
THE UNTRODDEN COUNTRY	91
DISTRIBUTISM AND AGRICULTURE	94
ON SMALLHOLDINGS	105

INTRODUCTION

MR. HESELTINE here speaks with authority, though certainly not with arrogance ; and perhaps the writer of a preface may for once justify his existence by saying this of the author more definitely than he can say it of himself. He has practised what he preached ; or rather (for there is a fine and not merely fanciful distinction) he has preached what he practised. He is not like some pedant who first draws up a plan on paper and then long afterwards is induced to let it be carried out in bricks and mortar, or more probably in plaster and stucco. He is not like some aged professor eventually visiting the South Sea Islands to test a theory thrown out in a Cambridge Common Room. The sense of private life and practical action comes very much first with him ; and he is expounding realities which he knows from the inside to be real. He has known all the difficulties and disadvantages of trying to live the true life of a peasant in a diseased industrial society. We can teach him nothing about those disadvantages and difficulties ; and he can teach us a great deal about the advantages and the virtues.

The general moral of all these studies can hardly

be missed, though it may in some quarters be misrepresented. But it can be represented rightly under a great many different figures or formulas. One way of stating it is this : that the writer fills up with solid stuff the rather empty outline left by that attenuated and starved and grossly ill-treated word Culture. He makes us understand how a word that sounds so bookish is nevertheless an integral part of words like agriculture and horticulture. Matthew Arnold, with excellent intentions, probably did a good deal to uphold this urban fallacy ; when he connected culture chiefly with literature ; so that it has come to survive in the libraries of an utterly uncultured person like Andrew Carnegie, rather than in the workshops of a really cultured person like William Morris.

Books can be ordered wholesale like bottles of beer ; and if they are consumed more slowly, it is sometimes because they are not consumed at all. But arts must be learnt individually, and taught individually ; because they are creative even in their humblest or most limited form. Therefore a man can impose education without having it himself. But a man cannot hand on tradition without having it himself. In modern times we have had a vast increase in the sort of education that the ignorant can impose ; and a vast decrease in the sort of instruction that only the instructed can provide. The politician who merely declares that so many thousand copies of such and such standard works shall be distributed to such and such schools, is in that exact sense

an ignorant man. The agricultural labourer who shows his son how to use a pruning-hook is in that exact sense a learned man. And if we ask how this obvious truth came to be neglected at the end of the nineteenth century, the answer is that the commercial spirit overshadowed a number of people not at all consciously commercial. Matthew Arnold would have been very much horrified at being thus associated with Carnegie and his libraries ; he would have been quite capable of appreciating the superiority of Morris and his crafts. Nevertheless, the germ of the error does lie in that definition of Culture which he thought so comprehensive ; knowing the best that has been said and thought on this or that subject. It is a good definition within the field of literature ; but the field of culture is much wider than the field of literature. And what is much worse, the definition leaves out the whole of that field which is the most fruitful of all. Culture is not only knowing the best that has been said ; it is also knowing the best that has been done ; and even doing our best to do it. Literature may be half creative and half critical ; but there is a sort of creation which is entirely creative and in no sense critical. It is only by diversion, and in exceptional cases, that the agricultural labourer could be found criticising his neighbour with a bill-hook. Even that is perhaps rather the difference between creation and destruction than between creation and criticism. But the agricultural labourer does make a hedge with a bill-hook as much as a

sculptor makes a statue of Hercules with a chisel. In both cases there may be people to whom the act seems merely destructive or negative ; the one producing only a litter of twigs and the other only a litter of chips. But that is only because there are people who do not know the hedge when they see it and people who do not know the hero when they see him. In both cases a man knows how to make something ; and therefore may be able to teach somebody else something about how it is made. But it must be taught by a man ; it cannot be taught by a machine. It cannot be taught by a machinery for supplying people with books ; any more than by a gigantic engine for pelting them with chisels. In this sense the agricultural labours that Mr. Heseltine calls crafts are really and truly arts ; whose generation is from artist to artist. You cannot teach a man broad-cast sowing by broadcasting lectures on the subject.

Mr. Heseltine, who actually begins with this example of the bill-hook, goes on to make very vivid notes of various other examples of the same thing. Thus, for instance, he takes the excellent example of thatching. Thatching has a thousand practical conveniences, as he points out ; it probably also has a certain number of inconveniences ; it is rather the way of things in this vale of tears. But the grotesque disproportion which has led to the destruction of so many useful things in the countryside, can only be estimated by comparing them once again with the sort of things that come from the town to destroy them. For example, it is assumed suddenly and superficially,

on the mere look of the thing that thatch threatens a special danger from fire ; though it does not really fulfil the threat any more than multitudes of other things. But imagine the same argument being employed to arrest the advance of the other things ; especially the modern and mechanical things. Imagine forbidding houses to be supplied with gas ; because gas poisons people and candles do not (even if they eat them), because gas acts like gunpowder and wax or tallow have no such expanding properties. Imagine a general veto at this moment on the use of petrol ; because that witch's oil has always been recognised as inflammable and deadly, ever since it was hurled as Greek fire among the Crusaders and the Saracens. These things threaten danger far more obviously and immediately than thatch ; but people take the risk because they want to run the race ; especially with a very expensive racing-car. In other words, the purely practical objections to most of these old crafts and traditions are not practical objections at all. They are in the true sense theoretical objections ; that is, they are examples offered as excuses for not accepting the theory on which the civilisation of the peasant rests.

With that conception of the peasant, in the real sense of the peasant proprietor, Mr. Heseltine deals here in a series of articles which I had the great pleasure of publishing in a paper with which I am connected. With the theoretical side of it I have dealt in many other places ; and with the practical side of it he is much more qualified to

deal than I. But my justification in appearing for a moment in this place is not so much the opportunity of introducing him as the pleasure of thanking him, for having brought so much new vigour and clarity of mind to the support of our common cause ; to what is in strict truth the only human cure for that inhuman evil—the separation of man from all that he makes, whether that separation be effected by a theory or a machine.

G. K. CHESTERTON.

THE CHANGE

OVER a sweep of silver mist in the twilight of an autumn morning lay the purple-veiled hazels of the straggling copse. From the middle of the copse crept a wisp of blue smoke which curled lazily into a sky of palest rose. I went through the soaking grass, parted the barrier of hawthorn and bramble and broke through the thick undergrowth towards the smoke. There, in a wide clearing by the crackling fire of brushwood, an old man leaned on his ash-plant. Behind him were stacked bunts and bavins and bundles of peasticks and against a young oak were half a dozen hurdles.

The man was holding a bill-hook, a tool which my great-grandchildren's contemporary wiseacres will be quite capable of describing as an instrument of ecclesiastical torture used for depriving progressive men of their sight, from "bill" or "ball" meaning eyeball, and "hook" or "hack" to cut out. And it is not improbable that the God-fearing woodman, if one survives, will give them their justification.

Already even the woodman's sons do not know the use of the tool. This woodman is the last of his craft. Four of his sons were killed in war,

one has gone to a city to be an engineer, another is driving a motor-lorry, and the seventh disappeared long ago to become, so the old man learns, the director of a firm of ship-brokers. None of them will use the bill-hook with the cunning of this old man who has razed the rank growth of the copse almost clean to earth, letting light to the primrose roots, cutting the hazels and withies to their precise length for bunts and bavins, and sorting out the hurdle-wood, thatching spars and peasticks.

The woodman learnt his craft through years of apprenticeship and effort. Some men never become good woodmen and some achieve a skill and finesse in their work which it is a joy to watch. They will split spars for the thatch or hurdle with the deftness of a politician splitting hairs. They are true artists, for unlike the politician they create.

The actual cutting of wood can only take place during a few months of the year. At other times the woodman is busy making sheep-hurdles, hedging, and thatching. In all these crafts he is almost completely independent of modern machinery or implements. His bill-hook, hands, and eyes, all very ancient tools, suffice. Hurdles are made entirely by splitting and intertwining thin saplings and branches. They are still used extensively, for no efficient substitute has been found. They will still be needed a few years hence when the woodman's son is moving the adoption of the report.

The good hedger rarely cuts except to clear

the hedge. To make it he twists, bends, and interlocks the saplings so that they grow into a really strong and efficient hedge which will outlast the best iron railings. That the work of the hedger is more economical and more enduring might reasonably be considered a substantial argument against the product of the mine and foundry in an age when it borders on the ridiculous to suggest the æsthetic argument. But it is not so. The hedger is going and the iron railings will win. To modern utilitarians the iron railings look stronger and more enduring. In their eyes it is no doubt a proof of the fatuity of the philosopher that he would have classed them with the men who "mistake transitory semblance for eternal fact."

The passing of the thatcher is more than anything else eloquent of the cataclysmic change which is taking place. The thatcher practises one of the oldest of all crafts very much in the same way as it has been practised since men first lived under roofs. The good thatcher makes a roof of straw or reeds which is as weatherproof as any other type of roof. He lays every straw in its right place and makes every straw secure. His finished work is never ugly, it is always neat and mellow, and it will outlast a generation. A thatched house is warm in the winter and cool in the summer. It is a house meet for sane and peaceful men in which they may live to a mature old age. Most men who die under a thatch die over eighty and content.

Yet "Progress" says that thatches are dangerous

and unhealthy. Public health authorities decree that thatches must go. But thatches are already going because the thatcher is passing. He is greater than his craft and will pass first. The thatcher will still be required for thatching ricks when he is gone and his son is being hammered on 'change.

The last of the thatchers are now greatly esteemed in their villages. They could be rich if they were mean and mercenary men. But they are craftsmen, and "unprogressive."

Thus is the craft which has served the human race from immemorial time and survived all other changes passing in this generation swiftly and suddenly as the change in our civilisation. None of the past changes have swept away age-old things so suddenly as this present change which makes to sweep away even the sacred and older things that the thatch has covered, the family and freedom.

It is perhaps futile to resist directly the relentless destruction of the Road by the automatic roadbreaker of modern "Progress," but the gangers and their masters might well pause to consider what sort of new Road they are going to lay in place of the old one. The crafts and craftsmen did move along their road to a greater perfection. The crafts progressed because the craftsmen found a joy in them. They were full of the wonder and the fascination of growth and achievement. A man is made happier by achievement in his craft, by making something more ingenious and more perfect than he has made it

before. Men whose lives centred round a craft had something to live for and they died old, sane, and sage.

What does modern industrial progress offer the sons of these craftsmen which will give them the same growth, achievement, length of days, and philosophy? To the man who will henceforth, in the machinery of mass-production, repeat the same turn of a handle an interminable number of times a day, what is to be given in place of pride of craft? What satisfaction is he to get from the contemplation of the immediate results of his efforts?—he never sees the ultimate results. What joy of achievement can he find in his work to give him content? What will “Progress” substitute for these things?

When the farm has been completely mechanised and the face of the earth has been renewed by sweeping away such things as hedges and copses and cottages, what will replace the silver mist, the purple tree-tops, the blue smoke and the rest of the environment which makes the woodman content with his work and life on low wages whilst the mechanic lives in a state of revolt for more money and less work, cultivating atheism and anarchy?

If man cannot live on bread alone, he certainly cannot *grow* on synthetic bread—not even with the addition of monotony and iron.

TWO IRISH PEACHES

IN the snug of "The Golden Pot" I was enjoying a meal which the great and the rich might envy were they not so unfortunate as to be denied even the desire of it—a thick slice of snowy, golden-crustéd bread, a lump of Cheshire cheese, pink and crumbly, a large crisp and silvery onion, and a tankard of lively cool brown beer.

A large spotted hound nuzzled my hand and suggested sealing eternal friendship with a piece of that Cheshire. His master, a straight, spare, white-haired man who looked about sixty, smiled generous consent to my share in his dog's affections, and incidentally in his own. We found ourselves of one mind on the weather, the ale, and the general beneficence of God.

My new companion told me that he, like myself, was fond of walking. "I walk two miles each way for my ale every day," he said, and then added proudly, "and I was eighty-two last Thursday." When he proceeded to show me a leg which a man half his age would be glad to own, my incredulity must have been obvious, for he turned to the landlord for confirmation of his eighty-two years and I could no longer doubt. Bar accidents he should beat Henry Jenkins of Ellerton-upon-Swale who lived to be a hundred and sixty-nine.

When he told me that he lived in the prettiest place in the world I knew he was wrong, for that is in Yorkshire and we were in Hampshire, but I let that go. In witness he drew from his pocket and gave to me an apple from his own orchard. It was a small apple of emerald-green with full rosy cheeks of wondrous bloom flecked with fine streaks like wind-blown tresses; its crisply subtle flavour was the perfect climax for my feast. He told me, and I might indeed have known, that it was an Irish Peach.

Knowing the reputation of the village for the longevity of its inhabitants, I guessed that he was a native of the place. And I was wrong. He assured me that he was a Londoner and had come here to end his days, not to die of course, but fade away.

"But," he said proudly, "my work will live a thousand years after me if they let it be." He was a wood-carver who had left his mark in the Law Courts in London, in Windsor Castle, Reading Museum, and innumerable places. And he added triumphantly, "the machinery they use nowadays can't make moulding like mine."

It seemed impossible that this vigorous young craftsman of eighty-two could be so much in love with life unless he shared it with someone.

"My missus," he said, answering my inquisitiveness, "is much younger than me, though as years go she's eighty-four, and," he added with the happiest smile in the world, "she's another Irish Peach!"

THE SMITH

THE man who shaped the first scythe, the first plough, and the first sword is the oldest of all the craftsmen. Although we know him as the father of the Iron Age, his prototype worked in the Bronze and Stone Ages. The man who made the first stone hammer or flint axe was really the first smith, and it was in the essence of his craft, as of all crafts, to invent and then to create.

Since the smith has existed as an important unit in all civilisations throughout human history, it may not be unreasonable to conclude that he has been necessary to civilisation and to true progress. He has always figured in the imagination, as in the song, a mighty man. His singularly important position in English life is well shown by the fact that with the Church and the Inn, the Forge has been the third essential feature of every English village. And it is worthy of note that the Devil has made his most violent attacks upon us through these three things. For what are Birmingham and Sheffield but the super-forges of "Progress" in which the Devil has developed his inventive genius to the full?

For this purpose the Devil has sapped the soul of the craft from the village smithies and con-

centrated it where it will best serve his ends under his immediate supervision, with the result that the village smithies are, as one of our well-informed newspapers needlessly assures us, "dying out."

The smith, perhaps through his strength and stature, his familiarity with iron and fire, or his length of lineage, has reigned as uncrowned king in many a village. His lineage has been unbroken throughout the recorded history of many villages, for the smith is always the son of the smith, and since the squire and the parson, the knight and the peasant all need his craft, he has been saved from the vicissitudes and wanderings of the agricultural labourer and the peasant. Even to-day, when other craftsmen whose crafts are being sacrificed to the Machine-God are forced to disperse to the colonies or sweat for their bread in factory towns, the smith still remains undisturbed.

But he does not remain a smith nor does he ring a mighty hammer on his anvil. He no longer prides himself on his victories in shoeing contests. His old job as a shoeing smith is passing with the passing of the horse. As a maker and mender of ploughs and harrows he is superseded by the inventions of the Devil in Birmingham.

On this account, we are told, the number of master smiths has fallen by half during the past forty years. As in the case of the thatcher and the mower the man will not wait to be killed by the death of his craft, and so horses are being worked unshod and farmers are finding it difficult to get their implements repaired.

Hence, we learn, the Ministry of Agriculture, *in an attempt to revive the dying industry*, sends round travelling vans fitted with oxyacetylene welding plant, power drill, emery grinder, and oil engine, so that the smith may once more rejoice in the exercise of his old craft!

This bright attempt at ironic humour is unfortunately too belated even to be funny—which is the most it could hope to be. For since the soul of the old craft of the smith has already been for some time in slavery in Birmingham, it would be clearly futile to try to revive the corpse left in the village, even with the most modern restoratives.

The mere fact that the form and figure of the smith remain in the village should deceive no one. He is no longer smith *qua* smith. In gratitude for the use of the soul of the craft which the Devil has found so effective, he has already given the ex-smith security of tenure and assurance of a sufficiency of this world's goods by making him a "motor-engineer." Often he has also compensated the smith for leaving him craftless by leaving him crafty.

Thus the village smithy has become a "Garage," the smith a "motor-engineer" and purveyor of petrol. He clears away the debris of wrecked road-hogs, and the Devil in the super-forges sends him little perquisites in the way of breakdowns due to defective workmanship. Since these things require no skill and they are both profitable and easy, it is clearly unnecessary for the ex-craftsman to do them himself. He there-

fore employs nimble village boys—they can turn the handle of the petrol pump and take the money quite satisfactorily. In the matter of repairs the ex-smith is, of course, familiar with the hammer, but since he has lost his craft to become prosperous and fat he has also lost his skill. Anyone who owns and drives a motor-car will understand that it might be legally dangerous to say more on the subject of village smithy-garages.

The smith has been changed, in effect, from a craftsman to a shopkeeper, from a producer to a parasite. For all who are not producers, that is all who do not cultivate, invent, create or build, are dependent on those who do these things for their sustenance and continued existence. As certain parasitic bacteria are necessary to the body, certain parasitic occupations are, if not absolutely necessary, at least contributory to the productive. They pay for their keep. But the prime fallacy of the age is that the parasite is regarded as of more importance than its host. This is shown clearly in the great increase in the numbers of people employed in non-productive work (see the census returns), in the greater wealth and social position of those following parasitic occupations, and in the discouragement of productive work such as farming.

Although a man may swallow a law he cannot thrive on it unless he is a lawyer. Nor can a man live on "trade" without the aid of producers unless he also is dishonest or purely parasitic or both. In either case the non-producers depend for material sustenance and the protection of

their bodies on a producer who fundamentally depends on *them* for nothing. He would still live and thrive if they ceased to exist.

This uneconomic and suicidal fostering of the parasite is well illustrated by the case of the smith. When he made a plough he was feeding his fellows, when he made a sword he was protecting them. When he merely buys and sells petrol he does neither. When his work consists of always mending and never making, a certain portion of his work may be useful but the bulk of it is unnecessarily parasitic.

The action of the State in the matter conforms to the current fallacy. It will teach him to *mend* by teaching him oxyacetylene welding, but it is content to leave the *making* to be done by the Devil in Birmingham—where the other things made at the same time and by the same processes are legions of starving, discontented, and diseased human beings on whom live multitudes of clerks, agents, and merchants and a few millionaires.

That is the modern idea of "Progress" applied to the smith and his craft.

THE VILLAGE CARPENTER

THERE are about five unprepossessing feet of him, and from the top of this small bundle of untidy clothes which shuffles about as our specimen of the ancient race of carpenters there emerges the most wonderful little head in the village.

Its cranium is inordinately large, its eyes dark and deepset under a pair of bushy brows, and its face and chin are far too small for the wealth of walrus fringe and black scrub they must always carry. For I am sure the carpenter shears rather than shaves.

He is bent and painfully wizened. Not that he is showing his seventy years, for he has surely always looked the same. Yet in some thoroughly inscrutable manner he carries in his frail form a dynamic force which is not a little terrifying. To see him knock a six-inch nail into an oak post is to live for the moment in a weird, unreal world. It simply can't be true. When he prepares to carry a beam heavy enough for a guardsman it is disastrous to offer assistance, for his muffled polite refusal is withering.

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Fortunately for our social system, he never went to college like his "missus." For he is a

Leveller with a lash. Contempt but feebly expresses his feeling towards social orders and rank, place-seekers, drunkards, and dole drawers—and, above all, liars.

But he is no bigot. A man may be a king and yet merit the praise of Old Bill. Such a one was King Edward the Seventh, with whom the Carpenter unbent and chatted frequently when he worked in the late Duchess of Albany's house. Of King Edward my carpenter has spoken the classic epitome of praise—"he was a man!"

He will chatter of the time when he worked with a teashop magnate in his early days, of how a now wealthy tobacco-shop owner started with him as a carpenter and begged or bought for a trifle the daily ration of tobacco of the non-smokers who were with him building tobacco shops.

As he talks *he works*. He never wastes time, watched or unwatched. And while I fumble for words to express a construction at which I have arrived by trigonometry he will improve on the idea before I have found them. Yet he is patient and tolerant and lets me down gently and imperceptibly.

But that I fear his lash I might almost expect honours from a grateful nation for keeping him carpentering—this terrible English Rousseau.

SMALL-OWNERSHIP IN PRACTICE.—I

BY a not uncommon defect in my reasoning capacity—a defect for which I am not more to blame than my educators—I fell into a serious though comparatively uncommon error a few years ago. I had been relieved by the State of the care of my body (and to some extent of my soul), for a matter of five years, when I was suddenly faced with the problem of taking care of both myself. I was demobilised in the truest sense in that I was robbed of the mobility which I had enjoyed for so long. I was dumped down, bereft of my wings, with no trade, profession or occupation and very little money.

It was then that I argued with myself on the following lines. I know that my first care is that of my immortal soul and that, since my soul is for all present practical purposes inseparable from my body, my second care is that of my body. I must preserve its life and prolong its existence. Then followed the prime error. I assumed, with the rashness common to youth, that the first thing necessary for preserving the life of the body is food. After propagation, all living creatures have but one activity in common—they must eat to live.

Therefore, if I make it my business, profession, or trade to produce food I shall be doing a work which is fundamentally necessary and important. From this error I naturally floundered into a veritable morass of misconceptions and mistakes. I deduced, for example, that since food production is the most necessary of human activities, food producers are the most important workers in the State. Therefore, a rational and more or less soundly governed State would encourage and protect food producers. As I have since discovered, the State knows better.

From evidence around me, I understood that food was dear and scarce, very many people were (and are) short of an adequate amount of it, many people die every day for want of it. Therefore, according to some vague recollections which I had of curious things called laws of supply and demand, I deduced that the food producer has some economic value.

I looked around at the multitudes of people who, according to my *a priori* error, must be fed, and I found that they were nearly all doing something for somebody else. A stranger to our civilisation might rashly conclude that the "something" must be producing food. Not at all. Very few people (about one in forty) are engaged in producing food for other people. Then, one might think, they spend some *portion* of their time in producing food for themselves. Wrong again. I see millions of people who spend the whole of their working hours writing millions of figures in millions of books and putting them

away for millions of years. I see millions of men distributing millions of newspapers. I hear of millionaires who spend their whole time thinking in millions.

But though I realise that, in some inscrutable way, all this may presage a millennium, I still fail to find any one of these vast multitudes expending the minutest effort in the production of the food without which they cannot, in the present state of knowledge, live to enjoy the millennium. Therefore, assuming for the present that they have to be fed and perceiving that their preoccupations are so important that they cannot be concerned with feeding themselves, the food producers who are responsible for feeding them assume a greater importance than ever.

This lamentably foolish conception of the importance of food producers might have led me to believe that their labour must be well rewarded, and that it should be a certain and even swift way to riches. But I was saved from such very serious error by my lack of the ambition for "getting"-on-there-rich-fat—and the rest, a defect for which I can hardly feel wholly to blame since a psycho-analyst has told me that it is due to a neurosis which had its origin in my being born very late in the day—thus showing great reluctance to "get" here at all.

Having satisfied myself, or as I have since discovered, deluded myself on the importance of this calling I aspired to follow it. Both my delusion and my ambition in this respect are unfortunately due, says the psycho-analyst, to an ego-complex.

32 SMALL-OWNERSHIP IN PRACTICE

I must be one of the most important men in the world and, therefore, I must follow the most important calling in the world. So I choose my calling and unconsciously give it a false importance.

There were other reasons which made me elect to live as a small-owner food-producer besides the importance of the calling and its probable capability of yielding me sufficient return for my labour to enable me to live without starving and possibly to live in a certain measure of comfort. I had suffered the torture of an office desk and knew its attendant terrors. I had prostituted my intelligence to brainless masters for their use in peace and the brainless monster of military incompetence for abuse in war, and I knew that the poor thing was sick unto death. I must give it liberty even at the risk of losing it.

A further reason for choosing the small-holding life lay in the fact that as a scientist, soldier, aviator, and journalist, I had acquired a "space-complex." I revelled in "the god-like air, the depth and the expanse of sky," and in the sights, sounds, and smells of the open country. Amongst my many other neurotic aberrations was an absence of violent distaste for manual labour.

Hence my decision to purchase a smallholding, work it for myself, and live like a king in my own country. The fact that I still live as a slave in somebody else's country arises from my original error in concluding that the production of food is of any importance in a civilised community.

SMALL-OWNERSHIP IN PRACTICE.—II

THE purchase of a smallholding of six acres and a cottage, freehold, should not present any great legal difficulties or need the intense application of profound legal learning. It should be possible to negotiate the purchase without legal interference or fuss.

And it is so possible. But it is highly dangerous and very rare in practice. The law has set a series of cunning traps in the buying and selling of land which are held up as a bogey to drive the owner and buyer to lawyers. Solicitors are authorised by law to charge an absurdly disproportionate fee for the trivial task of reading the deeds. Thus they have the first pickings of a smallholder's capital. I have since learnt that the fees paid to the lawyer for the work of a few minutes on the deeds of my holding are only a little more than the amount which I can earn as a smallholder in two months. From which we may judge the relative importance of the lawyer and the food producer. I should not omit to add that the lawyer's wages are authorised and secured by the State.

Those who have not sufficient money to buy a holding outright may have it mortgaged. Thus

it is not really the worker's holding at all, but he pays a substantial sum at fixed periods for the privilege of calling the holding his own.

The nature of the work to be undertaken on a smallholding depends on personal taste and the nature and situation of the holding. Small livestock, usually poultry, is selected by most smallholders whose limited capital necessitates a quick turnover. In spite of much that is said and written about the impracticability of poultry farming, poultry itself is undoubtedly very profitable stock. From the fact that a well-bred hen will give five times her own weight of eggs in a year, and eggs are amongst the most valuable foodstuffs we consume, it might also be inferred that egg-production is a useful and important industry. Such an inference is strengthened by the fact that we import some sixteen million pounds' worth of eggs per annum, and the egg and poultry yield of this country is somewhat higher in value than the wheat crop.

But the attitude of the State towards this industry forces one to reconsider such inferences. For taxation purposes there is still a considerable doubt as to whether poultry farming is husbandry. Poultry farmers are therefore often taxed on the assumption that they are not farmers, but of the same class as stockbrokers. This arises in part from the inability of the authorities to decide whether a fowl is an animal. Many local rating authorities have decided that egg production on a farm is not agriculture and therefore poultry farms are rated as business premises. In addition

to this many poultry farmers have to pay rates on their chicken houses.

Whether this official attitude raises the status of this portion of food production to the importance of book-keeping or whether those giddy heights are reached because it is not food production at all, is not clear to the smallholder, particularly if he is already suffering from the delusion that man must eat to live.

The man who attempts to run a holding on his own and keep himself and his family by his own labour as a food producer must not only have sound knowledge of his particular branch of food production, but he must be a sound handyman as well. For since he cannot, as a rule, obtain electric light by pressing a switch or water by turning a tap, he must make light and water accessible by his own efforts. He cannot, if he is working on his own with limited capital, pay for labour except in rare instances. He must therefore be his own carpenter and plumber, dustman, and policeman.

The full pleasure to be derived from being one's own dustman continuously cannot be told. The thrill of being one's own policeman takes one back to the delights of sentry-go on the Somme, particularly when it is necessary to wait round the corner of a fowl-house from 2 to 4 a.m. in the rain to catch a marauder. The law, as if it regrets the greater necessity of examining dog licences or catching motorists for motoring, is fairly sympathetic. A local thief who was unable to sit down for weeks after acting as a target for

36 SMALL-OWNERSHIP IN PRACTICE

a poultry-farmer's shot-gun, sued the poultry-farmer for assault. The local magistrate after hearing the defendant's assurance that he fired at the thief's feet, gave the defendant the verdict and *congratulated him on his shooting*. Which is very encouraging and serves to show that our local magistrates have their lucid intervals.

The necessity for doing the work which is done in towns by the public services makes the life of a smallholder a very busy one. He does, in fact, work from dawn to dusk. And since most of his work is contributory to the main work of tending his stock and producing foodstuffs he actually works longer hours at his trade than any other working man. As a rule he makes a little more than a bare living. He can very rarely take holidays because livestock cannot be left unattended, and his neighbours are all in the same position as himself.

Economically the smallholder is one of the most valuable members of the community. He works very long hours and produces very valuable foodstuffs, sometimes on land which the ordinary farmer would not attempt to cultivate. The fact that few smallholders make what is commonly called a good living, and many of them fail entirely, is due to conditions outside their control or interference. That such conditions exist proves the fallacy of my original assumptions that food is the most necessary thing for preserving life, and that food production is a most important human activity.

SMALL-OWNERSHIP IN PRACTICE.—III

UNDER present conditions, the smallholder has a hard and precarious existence because he is bound to support a host of parasites.

The first class of parasites, which he can never wholly escape, are the middlemen who take toll of his raw materials and his produce. Foodstuffs for his stock go through as many as five or six middlemen, some of whom never see or handle the goods, but all of whom take toll of them and raise the price. The larger farmer can grow much of his own feeding stuffs. When he finds it necessary to buy he can buy in large quantities and he is thus enabled to buy more "direct" and eliminate some of the middlemen's pickings. Most smallholders can only buy in comparatively small quantities.

A local smallholder recently bought six tons of maize in South America and had it shipped to him direct. Although the amount was comparatively small and the *freightage therefore proportionately high*, he sold a portion of the maize to a local dealer at a good profit. The dealer was able to sell again at a profit. This will give some idea of the pickings taken by the middlemen when the corn is bought by the shipload. The only

middleman employed by the smallholder was a friend who placed the order in South America. All the other charges on the consignment were the normal shipping charges.

When the smallholder sells his produce he pays proportionately high carriage on his small quantities. If he uses the local markets he must pay the auctioneer's fee and carriage to the market. The buyer sells to shops who in turn sell to the public, the profit which these various middlemen make being very much more than the wages which the smallholder gets as a reward for his labour as a food producer.

The smallholder cannot avoid supporting a quantity of vermin. Where wholesale slaughter (as of rats) is not forbidden by law, it is often forbidden by local conditions. Rooks, for example, were recently costing me about ten shillings a week in eggs. There is very little that can be done by individuals to stop them. When they are young and before they are a pest, the lads of the village may be urged to a "shoot" by the prospect of sport and rook pie. Unfortunately the largest rookery here is on the estate of a general who will not allow the rooks to be shot because he hates the sound of guns!

Hawks, magpies, weasels, stoats, all take toll at some time or another and the marauding fox has his friends and protectors.

But perhaps the worst parasites which the English poultry-farming smallholder has to endure are the foreign producers and merchants. At certain seasons of the year Danish and Dutch

eggs, for example, sell on the London markets at a higher price than English new laid. We are, however, so far spared the state of things which would allow the shopkeeper to sell foreign eggs at a higher price than English new laid. The housewife will not buy them. The retailer therefore sells them at the same price as the English or less, thus making less profit on the foreign eggs than on the English. Since he has paid least for the English he is, in fact, making an abnormally high profit on the English egg to compensate him for the small profit on the foreign egg. The English producer is thus directly supporting the foreign producer, to his own detriment. Some retailers also make a practice of mixing foreign eggs with English and selling them as English new laid.

These handicaps the poultry industry sought to avoid by a clause in the Merchandise Marks Act requiring the marking of foreign eggs with the name of the country of origin. Such a clause, which naturally provided an unique opportunity for the exposition of addled-egg humour in the House of Commons and in the more brilliant and witty of our daily newspapers, was vigorously opposed by a body of egg merchants whose names can only be pronounced with any approach to accuracy when your drink has gone down the wrong way. These gentlemen, all importers of foreign eggs, argued that it would be rough on the foreigner to give him the trouble of stamping his eggs. It might also make the eggs less easy to sell against the English product.

Our legislature, preserving its fine sense of relative values, considered the German-Jew egg importer, who rarely soils his hands with eggs, of more importance than the English smallholder food producer. So our imports of foreign eggs are increasing and our home production of eggs is decreasing.

Co-operation is dinned into the ears of the smallholders as the remedy for this state of affairs. It has been attempted in almost every village in the country. It fails because it needs money and labour—two things which the smallholder can least afford. A few co-operative societies have succeeded, but their success is not exactly an unmixed blessing when the organisation reaches the position of a vast capitalistic business.

Smallholders still carry on in spite of the unsatisfactory economic position of their calling, some of them because they have sunk all their small capital in the holding and cannot sell without serious loss, others because they are made of the stuff which will always carry on, and because they think it worth something to wash under the pump as the sun rises and to work as far away as possible from the idiots who behave as if they can live without eating.

Many smallholders fail because they think that a living can be made on a holding with very little capital and less experience. Adequate capital and technical knowledge are absolutely necessary. Very few survive the lack of them.

THE PASSING OF PETER

A MARKETING MORAL

“There, in its cool and quiet bed,
She set her burden down and fled:
Nor flung, all eager to escape,
One glance upon that perfect shape
That lay, still warm and fresh and fair,
But motionless and soundless there.”

CALVERLEY.

HE lifted it and eyed it over with the care of a connoisseur. Satisfied, he placed it gently on the scales and the pointer swung across. Good enough.

He held it up to the light, saw that it was translucent and flawless, and then laid it in its bed in the warm chamber with its fellows and closed the door. Thrice a day he fondled it and turned it over. On the seventh day he held it once more to the light, and saw the wondrous spidery network growing within. On the fourteenth day he looked again, saw the lovely shape now almost opaque, and noted the gentlest pulsations. A week later, after a few hours of persistent tapping, there was a cracking and a splitting, and Peter popped forth, a gorgeous ball of golden fluff, with eyes and beak and legs, very much alive.

He watched over Peter with more than the tender care and solicitude of a father. Peter and his hundred fellows were kept in a cosy house warmed by a perpetual stove which drank paraffin by the gallon. Swarthy Mexicans laboured under the burning sun to grow corn and load it at Buenos Ayres for England, where millers ground it and many men carried it post-haste to Peter.

Dour Scots went short of porridge that Peter might have his groats. Care and food were lavished on Peter, and he grew lusty, although some of his weaker brethren died, and put up his cost by so doing. His master, all the zest taken out of his life and the money out of his pocket by the care of a few thousand Peters, became mercenary. He had looked with secret glee and delight on each little Peter which he brought into the world, but now he bemoans the fact that each Peter has cost him five shillings not counting the sweat of his brow.

Then came a sad day. "It's no use, Peter, you are leggy, your eye is pale and your comb sticks up; you will never make a father of good Wyandottes. I'm sorry." Thus the master. And Peter is bundled into a basket, the four plump pounds of him, and has a long ride in the noisy and terrifying Ford. In the pouring rain, all wet and bedraggled, he is roughly dumped in a bare and windy cage in a row of many other Peters. Gross and uncouth men, muttering strangely, pull him and pinch him one after another. Then comes a burly man in a hurry repeating a mystic incantation rapidly over

each Peter, "two and three and four five six, six I'm bid two and six." And Peter's doom is sealed. The rough men drag him from the cage, crush him amongst many strange and terrified Peters, another ride. . . .

EPILOGUE

THE HIGGLER: Awlright, bob a pahnd—corst me bob a pahnd, 'e did.

.

THE WHOLESALER: Good lot this mornin', eighteenpence a pound, rough plucked. Shall I send 'em along? Righto!

.

THE RETAILER: Yes, sir, we shall deliver in half an hour. Two shillings a pound to-day, sir.

.

HOTEL SUPERBE

A la Carte

	s.	d.
Volaille de poulet rôti	5	6
Fricassé de dindon à l'Espagnol	5	0
Caille à l'Américain	4	6
Jambe de faisan	5	0

SIC TRANSIT.

FEEDING OURSELVES

SLOWLY but surely the truth that we must eat to live is gaining ground. It is a holy and wholesome thought that even the mathematical theologian, burying faith under formulæ, and the professional economist with his hardly less futile game of burying facts under figures, must be fed. For it gives us a hope of a final and effective way of dealing with them when their nonsense has exhausted the endurance of sane men.

Heaven knows why a writer in *G.K.'s Weekly*, having started well enough by giving us this truth as the first corner-stone of Distributism, should go on to utter in the same breath the prime and favourite fallacy of the industrialists who have brought us to our present pitiable plight! He says "our industry pays for the food which we cannot produce and must import," a statement which contains as many lies as words, and it is hard to think that he really meant it. It is equally hard to understand why he should have dragged it in at all unless it were to give us, unconsciously no doubt, an example of how thoroughly well the Manchester School has propagated such lies.

We can produce all the food we need. It is not true to say that we must import any *necessary* food as apart from luxury foods, and although we do not at present produce sufficient food for our needs, industry does *not* pay for the food we import.

Let us deal with the twaddle about not being able to feed ourselves with home-grown food. At present we produce something like a third of our food on our own soil. I am sorry this "third" brings us to figures, because they are hateful things which can be made to lie in the most perfectly plausible and shameless manner—they are the very best medium for lies and used accordingly. I believe they can lie on their own account. However, we must run the risk for a short canter.

Bearing in mind that we already produce one-third, note that our arable acreage for 1924 was very roughly eleven million acres out of a possible fifty (generally agreed by opposed authorities), the acreage under wheat was, again roughly, one and a half million acres out of a possible eight (again generally agreed).

It is, in fact, now admitted by most economists and politicians in their more sane and truthful intervals that we have a sufficient area of suitable land on which to grow our own food. Facts forcing them to this at last, they seek to defend the present state of things by arguing as did Mr. E. F. L. Wood in 1925 when he was Minister of Agriculture. In replying during a debate on the Third Reading of the Agricultural Returns Bill,

he said, " You say you can grow a lot more of what you want to eat in England on your own soil. . . . I agree." And then he bolted from the issue, " It can be done—at a price—but when you have done that, it comes down to the question : Can you do it at the price? " We will deal with this bit of nonsense and its question later. For the present, it seems, we *can* grow the food, but for some obscure reason connected with " price " we do not *want* to do so. Which is, of course, another story.

The objection to growing our own food is that it costs us more to do so than to buy it. It is argued that in order to buy this cheaper foreign food we sell manufactured articles and raw materials, the products of industry. So we come to the fallacy in the writer's words quoted above—" our industry pays for the food . . . "

Now in order to pay for the imported food, our exports of the products of industry must be such that the money we get for them is sufficient to pay for the imported food. Our imported food bill for 1924 was some 560 millions. We exported from industry some 724 millions' worth of raw materials and manufactures. But against this 724 millions must be set most of the 700 millions which we paid for imported raw materials (some of which we used for making the articles for export) and imported manufactured articles which our own industry could not, or at least did not, supply.

It is obvious that before industry can be said to make good so generously the deficiencies of

agriculture, in other words, pay for the food we fail to produce and must have, it must cover its own deficiencies—the raw materials and manufactures which it fails to supply and which we need.

So that when industry has taken 724 millions over the counter, and then paid 700 millions for its own inefficiency and raw materials, it is left with 24 millions with which to pay an imported food bill of 560 millions on behalf of agriculture! Hence, the tale that “industry pays for the food we cannot produce,” is pure humbug. Heaven knows who or what pays that food bill or whether it is ever paid, but that does not concern us here. It is clear that industry does not pay it.

The expression, “the food we *must* import,” is also very misleading. There is good reason to believe that there is a real and definite sense in which we must *not* import. We might almost say that we must cease importing, not so much from choice, economic advantage, or necessity arising at home, but from necessity arising abroad, as a result of the fact that other countries may be unable or unwilling to export to us.

Russia is one example of how a country may fail us as a source of food. According to Mr. Harold Cox, if the present tendencies continue in America (i.e. the increase of population and industrialisation outstripping the necessary expansion of agriculture) we shall find that her now declining food exports will cease, and she may even need to import. In addition to such factors as these, war is still possible!

We can far more easily fly than keep the sea-routes open, *and so can all our potential enemies!* When we consider the development of aviation by other Powers and our own present aerial policy, or indeed any other, the idea of our obtaining and holding command of the air as well as the sea is just silly.

Instead of subsidising the coal industry, for example, to the tune of some £30,000,000 because the coal industry is *supposed* to help us to buy food from abroad, it would be far more practical and ultimately economical to help agriculture to produce the food direct and at prices below "imported" prices. Even if that were not possible, and we were forced to produce at a higher price, that price would at least stay in this country. The resulting development of agriculture would at least employ some of the million unemployed, though, no doubt, without increasing the present wicked wage of 30s. a week for a farm labourer.

It is obvious to anyone acquainted with the conditions on small farms and holdings that the individually owned small farm produces more per acre and at less cost than the large estates. It is equally obvious that assistance to yeoman farmers and smallholders in the way of relief from burdens such as rates and tithes, the improvement of marketing facilities, and the provision of capital for better equipment, would result in increasing the production of food and lowering its cost.

The encouragement of agriculture in this most profitable form would not only absorb much of the

surplus population of cities, but it would make for a healthy and sturdy race of men from the pitiful and disease-ridden hordes in the hovels in towns who would find a living waiting for them in the country.

To the inevitable ass who would reply that we cannot all go back to the land the answer is, as the old joke says, "in the infirmary." We cannot, nor is it necessary that we should. Yet we cannot all stay in the cities unless many of us will be content to stay in the infirmary, the sanatorium, and the workhouse, and many others will be content to starve to death as they are doing at this very moment. There is no need for us all to go back to the land to feed ourselves. At present about one in forty of the population is engaged in agriculture—another one would leave no man unemployed in the towns and everyone fed with our own home-grown food.

In another direction food growing is capable of very vast extension. God forbid that I should welcome the clatter and stink of Science in this blessed spot! But Science can increase food production enormously. The comparatively recent application of Mendelism to wheat growing and poultry culture has shown us that the possibilities are beyond estimate.

THE HERETIC

ON the very outskirts of my village stands a little inn, remote and snug. It is beneath the notice of motorists, for it carries no mystic sign of their fraternity. It is therefore unspoilt by prosperity.

I found it on a calm autumn evening after a long tramp and the landlord joined me in a pot and a pipe on the bench outside.

A cock pheasant sauntered across the road.

"A good year for birds?" I asked, for he was obviously a sportsman.

"Not so bad, considering," he said slowly, "but nobody cares nowadays. They just let 'em fend for 'emselves and what with the woods being cut and no corn grown they don't get a chance. When I was a gamekeeper for old Farmer Budd" (he jerked his thumb towards the copse behind the inn), "he used to pay his rent by letting the shooting, and I reared all the birds in my spare time, more or less.

"These new farmers are afraid of Friday night and won't employ no 'ands. . . . They're all for machinery—and that can't rear birds. . . . They don't do no better'n John Budd—but then, they're more *businesslike*," he added scornfully.

"But don't you think," I asked, "that farming is in a bad way because of foreign corn coming in?"

"That shouldn't make us get less to the acre," he countered, "and anyway food's food, and it always pays to grow it so long as we haven't too much. But these fellows don't know the land and don't treat it right—and then there's these motor-cars," he commented cryptically, as a large limousine sped past the inn.

He must have guessed I was a little puzzled, so he explained. "There's no manure from motor-cars, nor from the clattering things they use instead of horses for ploughin'."

"But what about these artificial manures," I objected, "they're supposed to be very effective and economical?"

He touched his nose with an air of finality.

I suggested that motors at least brought trade to innkeepers.

"They've killed good inns," he said sadly, "what they want is hotels, and those clever fellows in London buy the inns and turns 'em into hotels so they can charge folk double for their beer. And then," he continued, warming up to it, "motors are doing the country no good. All day and all night they run past here."

He paused and then added significantly, "And they're not *all* on business! What I mean is while these folk are racing round the country they're not doing any work, but *they've got to be fed just the same*. And when farming's in a bad way, how are we going to do it? Things are

pretty bad, I reckon, and they look like getting worse."

He took a long pull at his pot.

"That seems sense to me, sir, I dunno what you think about it?"

Sense enough! But what damnable heresy in the ears of our economists!

THE SCYTHER

ON a June morning when the first skylark takes the air and the face of the waking meadow is still wet with tears of joy at the kiss of day, the song of the stone breaks on the sickle and the scythe. Waist deep in the scented grass the mower whets his blade, tries the edge, and grips the handles of the snathe. He bends for the swing and another song bursts forth—the song of the scythe.

This is the greatest song in the world. It is a song in praise of God and Man ; it is a song of joy and triumph, and as the blade sweeps back with a tuneful sigh it echoes a dirge for the departed glory of the grass.

Since men first joined hands with God in growing corn they have mowed, in the beginning with the sickle and then also with its child the scythe. And when God inspired His helpers to fashion this thing of wonder and beauty He gave to them alone the power to make it sing. In the youth of the world men shaped the sickle in stone, and in ancient civilisations in bronze, always with the magic curve which cuts with the greatest ease to man and tool. Modern inventive genius has done nothing so perfect as the sickle and the scythe. For in their cissoid curves beauty and utility are inseparably wedded.

Nothing short of infinite wisdom could have impelled man to make the scythe so that it works best at the break and close of day. Man cuts the corn to make his bread, but he cannot live on bread alone. At the break of day, before the world has tumbled noisily out of bed, he may hear the silent word of God and at the close of day he may make reply. No mower has ever been atheist or agnostic. Men, primal men, who continually witnessed the miracle of the birth of the day had no doubts of God. They thought He resided in the Sun and became sun-worshippers, in weird idols and we called them heathens, and others thought He dwelt in all sorts of unlikely places—and so He does. But they did know He dwelt.

After mowers all manner of men—sailors, night-watchmen and the rest whose souls drink wisdom at the spring of dawn—have been preserved in sanity and escaped the idiocy of free-thinking and intellectual pride. Men who habitually see the sun rise are not babblers but stable, silent men.

No wonder the scythe has such a song, and only a man can make it sing. It is a man's tool. The puling, bulbous-browed, scientific crank or the pathetic wreck of humanity which some caprice of the devil, foisted on us as progress and civilisation, makes to pass for a man in our cities—these creatures approach a scythe with awe. To them it looks a hideous, fearsome thing and they rightly conclude that if they are so familiar as to attempt to whet its edge or take the snathe in

their hands they will sustain a serious injury. And so they will. As for making it sing . . .

The man who has swung the scythe has fed mankind and the scythe has served well and joyfully through all the vicissitudes of humanity until the middle of the last century. The revolution which is burning the thatch is breaking the scythe—perhaps to make it into a sword. The passing of the scythe synchronises with the growth of modern sophistry and mental chaos.

True, its successor, the cutting machine, which works with an abominable rattle and clatter instead of a song, can cut ten times as quickly. It thus relieves several men of work, at present in order that they may starve. It saves time and enables men to lie abed—starving their souls of the visions of the dayspring.

The youth who strode with his scythe in steady swing through the dew-steeped meadow, working as only a man can work, grew into a man from whom the race might take its physical stock and philosophical stability. His successor now sits high on an iron seat and occasionally bellows "Whoa!" On the latest tractor-cutters he merely sits and sits, occasionally turning a wheel. *He* is growing, presumably, into what evolutionists would call with unconscious (or should we say subconscious?) irony, a "superman."

It may be heresy to say so, but the clattering machines have their limitations. They cannot cut everywhere. So the sickle and the scythe are asked to assist at their own obsequies. The harassed earth, too, keeps many a corner and

cranny where the cutter cannot work and she may hear only the sweet song of the sweeping blades. The machines do not cut so close as the scythe, they waste good "bottom."

A dozen years ago a good mower, working from dawn at half-past three until sunset, with a break for beer and sleep at midday, could cut an acre of grass. He was paid, in this part of Hampshire, about four shillings an acre. He was given an ample quantity of good ale, his cottage rent was two shillings a week, he could grow his own vegetables. Home-cured bacon was plentiful and cheap. All necessary food was easily obtainable in the district and it was home-grown and of good quality. At harvest time the farmers provided free feasts for the labourers, and the womenfolk had such perquisites as gleanings.

The man who sits on the iron cutter seat to-day is paid thirty to thirty-five shillings a week. His rent is five to eight shillings. Nearly all his food is imported, synthetic, or otherwise messed about. None of it is free or even cheap. He pays sufficient money for it to feed a host of middlemen and enrich a multitude of manufacturers and wholesale merchants. Formerly his spare time was spent in gardening or in sociable drinking in the village inn which was his club. Now he spends his time drinking poisoned, thin, expensive beer or attending religiously political or politically irreligious meetings.

The blessings of labour-saving machinery have come to the farm. Those who can afford the machinery and those who own farms may effect

considerable economy of labour and time and thus farm more extensively and efficiently or at least make more profit. They may even become very wealthy. Forget for the moment the man by whose toil humanity has been fed to grow to this advanced stage of progress. Agriculture, under these improved methods, should be improving. By some strange caprice of Providence *it is not.*

So this is Progress! If it continues in its present direction we may yet hope to hear the song of the scythe over its grass-grown grave. It will need a real man and a full forty-two inch blade to sing the song which will end with a meetly ironic sigh.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE HOUSE OF LORDS FROM AN AGRICUL- TURAL LABOURER ON THE SUBJECT OF THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER

MY LORDS,

For a thousand years we have been partners in the first work of mankind, you and I. Between us we have kept this land green and pleasant, fair and fertile. We have fed its heroes and philosophers, its kings and its poets. Upon our labour and upon the wealth we brought her by the fruits of the earth and the wool from the sheep we tended, has been built England's greatness and prosperity.

You have held and ruled the lands—we labourers have had them in our keeping, content to serve you and to labour for the joy of tending English earth, taking as the material reward of our toil plain food, rough clothes, and small homes. We have denied ourselves your comfort and your culture, content that you should enjoy it through the surplus wealth which our labour has produced in abundance.

When you would stand as leaders of men we have given you our loyalty in peace and you

have reigned as kings in your shires. We have answered your call to arms and died under your banner in battle without knowing or asking why.

In whatever age you have come to us to complete your ennoblement—the king may give right and title, but it is the possession of land which ennobles a man—we have held your estates ready for you. We have not cared whether your rank was the reward of bravery in battle, service of the State, of political knavery, the concealment of a king's follies or the care of his concubines. We have regarded neither bar sinister nor dexter. It has been sufficient for us that you have come back to the land and turned from foolish things to the sanity of the soil.

In these later days when our food has become dearer and poorer in quality and we cannot eat our own, when you have taken from us, you will say by economic necessity, the perquisites which were ours by right for generations—the vegetables, skimmed milk, pig offals, ale, and cheap cottages—have we not endured these things dumbly for the sake of you and your estate and our blessed land in its travail?

And now, my Lords, when the spirit of business and usury, of cheating and money-changing, reigns in high places, when the loudest voice in the land is that of fools who say that man can live by trade, by insuring and banking, by coal and railways, and statistics—you who know with us that man cannot even live by bread alone have listened to the lies and left us, you who have

shared with us the first of man's vocations have denied us even thirty pieces of silver.

You have said that every other labourer is more worthy of his hire than the agricultural labourer, and to the least of them you have granted a greater wage than we presume to ask. We do not ask our worth, for we nor no man knows it.

And if any man should ask us, my Lords, why you have forsaken us and the land we serve, leaving us contemptuously in the lowest place, what shall we answer?

For shame, my Lords!

I am, my Lords,

Your humble and faithful servant.

THE OLD LADY IN CRINOLINES

SHE has gone at last, as I feared she would. Yesterday she was still there, a little uncertainly, it is true, but I could just see her, although perhaps as much in imagination as in fact.

To-day, alas, there is no sign of her, and I must henceforth be content with a tenuous memory—after all, she was but an airy wisp of a creature herself, zephyrous and intangible, yet no less of the stuff that dreams are made of than the rest of us.

Perhaps she will return in the spring, or (unhappy thought) she may be gone for ever. At least, I know that she will not come back until the pale and tender leaves make just the right setting for her billowy crinoline gown.

For she was an artist to the core. She must show herself in a perfect setting, altogether a perfect picture, or not at all. That, I fear, is why she has gone. You may call it vanity in her, but that would be both ungallant and untrue.

I am sure she was not so vain as wise. Would that we could all go rather than stay and spoil the picture! She had too fine a sense of the fitness of things to stay when she could no longer delight, no longer allure.

She was, indeed, a past-mistress in the alluring art. She never failed to dress in perfect harmony with the day, in dimity white or the palest misty blue of the horizon on a summer afternoon, in sober grey when the skies were fitful and gloomy, and in the evening she had a gown for every shade of sunset, rose and russet, gold and crimson, amethyst and lavender.

Many a day I longed to stride across to where I saw her posing by the hawthorn. She would stand with her prettily coiffured head (for *she* was a true woman) just ever so coyly on one side, bending ever so slightly forward, sometimes, it seemed to me, half in invitation.

I had a great desire to speak to her—just one word of admiration or courtly praise. She might, I thought, if she were kind as she was fair, permit me to take her hand, and bending low to lay upon that altar my offering of a kiss.

But, alas! I have neither satin breeches nor silken hose, no powdered wig nor fine cravat, and it were sheer profanity to go to her dressed otherwise. Besides, I knew instinctively that she would not speak to me, that on my approach she would go for ever and I should see her no more, that she would not even remain as a memory, and I should be but a disillusioned fool.

It would, moreover, have been base ingratitude for her favours of delight which I had enjoyed so often from afar.

To-day, as I have said, she has gone. It was the storm of the day before yesterday which weakened the hold of the last golden leaves on

the hedge in which she stood. And as they fell they did her, and me, a great unkindness.

I must not complain. It was really passing kind of her to stand there all the summer for my delight—a creature of pure phantasy, a glimpse of Heaven framed in my hawthorn hedge on the western skyline.

THE SECOND SPRING

JUST now Nature is skittish—in her second childhood, so to speak. If any Rip Van Winkle were to awaken in the country on the misty morning of one of these mild, warmish days he might well be puzzled to know whether it is early spring or late autumn. Nature is just having her little joke before letting us in for the chilly blast, good and hearty, and many innocents are deceived.

Here and there a silly apple tree is in full bloom—which means a sheer waste of strength and beauty, for it will fail miserably next spring. Blossom and a little warmth are spring enough for the bees, so they are streaming in and out of the hive, but on fruitless, or rather nectarless, errands.

Many of the feathered songsters which have been away from us during the summer, nesting in the copses or foraging amongst the corn and stubble, are back about the houses and singing as merrily as in March. Shy birds, such as goldfinches, are showing themselves in the garden and making spasmodic attempts at song.

Those birds which see through the second spring trick and won't sing are having their singing done for them by that bundle of feathered

impudence, the starling. He not only blows his own rather painful trumpet, but he imitates almost every creature within hearing.

In his own weird way he can maiouw, bark, quack, and cackle tolerably well. The ring-leader of these mimics who batten on me, whistles for the dog in a way that foretells trouble for him one of these days. Still, it is all bright and cheerful, like lambing-time.

"All," did I say? I was wrong. There is one individual, runner-up to the starling for cheek, who spoils the picture. He whistles blithely of buttercups and daisies and nice little spots for nesting in one breath, and then he gives, ugh! that shrill, shivery pipe all white and biting like drifting snow in a nor'-easter, to tell us we shall soon have his picture on a Christmas-card.

He knows about it all—he knows! And I have half a suspicion that in some inscrutable way he is quite possibly responsible. At any rate, he and his red breast and cheeky ways would be precious small beer if it were not for Christmas. Nobody else wants the cold and snow.

I don't. I didn't. I started off on the second spring, and here we are in the cold in no time. That's just it!

THE SERGEANT

HE is a lean man, tanned and weathered by exposure to the tropic suns and storms on the outposts of the Empire. He is full brother of the men who manned the Wall, the men who crossed the great hills with Charlemagne, and the men who blasphemed their way through Russian snows for France and the Little Corporal.

He spent his youth in a hard saddle policing the farms of African settlers against the natives who resented our intrusion. And then in a shameful war he fought because England fought—and asked no questions. He hid behind the kopje boulders, crawling from Dutch bullets on his half-issue of iron rations, that England might keep her territories (though losing honour), and that her insatiable, unweanable whelps might keep their gold and diamonds.

When he was too old for service he retired on a small pension from the Colonial Government. He came home and settled down to eke out his livelihood by growing as much of his own food as he could. During the European War he worked on an aerodrome and trained old soldiers for home defence.

After the war he began to fight. Under the

changed conditions his pension had become inadequate. He must therefore turn to some work to earn more. He had no other trade other than a soldier's, but on his holding he had learned something of market gardening. Having no capital available the only thing to do was to increase his labours, already considerable, on his land. He extended his strawberry beds and vegetable garden and kept more hens.

But the elements which he had defied in other climates were still relentlessly seeking their revenge. Gardening, where everything must be done by hand, is very hard work. Every ounce of food must be wrested from the soil. Hence the sergeant in his new fight was frequently knocked to the ropes—and once he nearly took the count.

As soon as he began to sell his produce he was at the mercy of the middlemen who proceeded to take toll of his profits and live on his labour. He could not afford a conveyance and therefore could not market his own produce. The only alternative was to work harder still and feed the middlemen.

Then he heard of some disused and ruined greenhouses five miles away. He bought them cheaply and in spite of the fact that he was quite unskilled he dismantled them, dug up the brick foundations, carted what was sound of the debris to his own place, and re-erected the structures. He transplanted the whole of two ruined houses and made them fit for use.

Naturally enough he received a knock to the ropes for this. When he was sufficiently recovered

to crawl about, he proceeded with the re-erection. *Hardly had he started the foundations when his rates were trebled without warning,* although he could not hope to make any profit from the houses for at least a year. The increase on the rates doubled the cost of his houses. The system of increasing the rates is interesting—the local assessor, who may be the cobbler or a farmer, hears through village gossip that the sergeant has erected some greenhouses. Forthwith ten pounds go on the rates, though the greenhouses are as yet only a rumour.

Thus does a country which screams for food and is in serious danger of starvation in war, encourage food production.

Now that the sergeant's greenhouses are erected he has to work like a slave to cultivate his tomatoes and cucumbers because he cannot afford labour-saving equipment for watering and so on. Such equipment would not enable him to rest or loaf. To this man it would only be the means of increasing production and sparing him the excessive fatigue which must sooner or later knock him out. Recently, after a season of hard toil, he was faced with the loss of his tomato crop because of the failure of his water supply, due directly to his need for the very small capital necessary to secure it.

Because the man cannot raise the little capital required for heating his greenhouses he gets less than half value for his labour. He is forced to depend on the weather, and even in a successful season he can only sell on the late, and therefore

low, market. Here is an industrious food-producer working without consideration of hours of labour, or limit to his efforts, and doing the most necessary thing to be done in this country. He is the most valuable of all citizens, and the nation ignores him except where its laws may oppress him. A few miles away the man whose gold and diamond mines he made safe has a vast estate—half-cultivated. The man himself, according to the current picture papers, is displaying the ultimate results of the sergeant's labours on the Lido or at Deauville.

The Government which has no money to lend to the sergeant to help him to grow more food, which is even too poor to relieve him of taxation, spends millions propping up the coal industry or overseas trade. The coal industry is already in its death-throes and cannot be saved—oil and electrical power from water and wind are displacing it as certainly as stupid and unbalanced men have displaced capable patriots in the Government. Since food is our fundamental need, overseas trade is but a means to an end, a means of making a profit with which we may ultimately buy food. It is a means which is dying as certainly as the coal industry, and these things having had their brief day cannot live again in the same flesh. They have served their purpose of making a few men richer and many men poorer.

It is clearly more logical and more economical to get our food by the direct encouragement of food production than by the indirect means of forcing men by starvation to dig coal to sell to

foreigners in order to make a profit with which to buy food from foreigners. Unfortunately the more logical and economical process would not also serve the additional purpose of upsetting the balance of wealth and social content, and it is therefore "unpractical."

It would perhaps be unreasonable on this account to expect that the sergeant should be estimated at his true value and be given his place in the State accordingly. Or that he should be given as much consideration as a coalowner who owns coal as the reward of the business wisdom of an ancestress in the disposal of her virtue. It would be equally unreasonable in this age to expect that the sergeant should be allowed to do any more than work for a subsistence till he drops. But it is not unreasonable to expect that this at least shall not be denied him, that whilst he fights to win his bread and margarine he should not be penalised by rating and taxation and the incubus of middlemen. The State can, and should, lift these burdens from him.

The burden of the middlemen can be eased by assistance in co-operative marketing and facilitation and cheapening of railway transport such as the Governments of Denmark and the Netherlands provide for their smallholders. With regard to rating, it is worthy of note that many smallholders in this country have no metalled road to their holdings and yet they pay for roads which they cannot use, for police which operate only on the motor roads, and for workhouses which they will never live to enjoy.

The sergeant is not a myth or an isolated example. He is an existing fact and he is also a type. There are tens of thousands of him all over the country. One of them, nearly seventy years old, has even grown corn, cut it and thrashed it *by hand* to feed his fowls, and he is now forced to leave his poor dilapidated shack and live in a caravan (if he can get one) rent-free on a comrade's land. These men cannot let England down.

They are the salt of the earth. They will be happy if they are allowed to provide John Bull's breakfast. Is it for the good of John's health that he should be allowed only the salts he must take on a sixpence?

THE FIRST FROST

IN this very early hour of the day, before the first gleams of grey light have appeared in the east, the grass becomes suddenly visible. The microscopic jewels of frost catch and reflect just the faintest light from somewhere, perhaps from the hard, bright stars and the sweep of the Milky Way, for there is no moon. Over the still pool there comes, as from nowhere, the thinnest layer of ice.

In the garden the leaves of the beans and marrows wilt at the sudden stab which is their death-blow, and the celery and the parsnips gain the crispness which gives them perfection. In the cowshed and the henroost the ice king's whisper is heard, and from this moment there will be less milk and fewer eggs.

Over in the wood the squirrel curls himself a little tighter, and knows that there is a hard day's nutting ahead, for the store must be filled without delay. The vixen and her cubs nestle closer in the "earth," but for the last time.

For when dawn breaks the Hunt will come a-cubbing to scatter her children far and wide, and during the next few months she and they will need all their wits to keep out of the jaws of the dogs and retain possession of their brush and pads.

Away in the great city the policeman stamps his feet and finds it time to be on the move again. In the foyer of the cabaret a thoughtful porter has set the logs a-blazing, and there is a rustle and crunch of silk as the first Rose of Winter wraps her petal cloak a little closer. The car will hum its way home with radiator shutters down.

Under the arches by the river a thin, hard hand pulls at a shawl to make it cover where it can't, and a little nose snuggles closer to the warm breast which sinks in a gentle sigh. Near by the old soldier coughs his short, dry cough, uncurls himself, and goes for a walk.

By noon the sun will be high in a bright sky, and we shall all be grateful for his welcome warmth. But his promise of warmer days is an idle one, for the messenger of the relentless ice king has already spoken.

THE NEW FARMER

THE largest farm in the village changed hands after the War.

It had been farmed by a gentleman-farmer, or rather, his farm bailiff, while he busied himself with matters more suited to the gentleman than the farmer—hunting, golf, and racing. The land was farmed well on what would now be called old-fashioned lines. But the bailiff knew his job and worked hard.

The New Farmer was an ex-officer who had served most of his life abroad, a vigorous man in the prime of life. He had studied farming—with the result that before long the bailiff left.

He was thoroughly progressive, and it seemed clear from the first that he meant business. He replaced the horse ploughs by tractors, and installed a labour-saving water system. The old pumps were replaced by engines, the cowsheds reconstructed on sanitary lines, tall iron shelters were erected for the ricks. Motor-vans replaced the milkfloats, and a couple of mighty silos grew up like mushrooms. So far, excellent.

Then, in addition to his cattle, he began to run those two much-vaunted sidelines, pigs and poultry, pigs in the copse which he cut and

poultry on some very suitable rough pasture. When he found that marketing conditions were bad he started his own shop in the local town.

Such enterprise clearly deserved success.

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But Success has proved a wanton, and she seems as elusive as ever. Before long the New Farmer found that his heifers yielded but poorly, many proved abortive. He lost sow after sow and litter after litter, and his fowls laid truly golden eggs so far as the cost of production was concerned.

A soldier, however, can fight. He studied all the most recent scientific research into the problems of nutrition and breeding.

His cattle, he concluded, had contracted some mysterious disease, so he bought quantities of an expensive cure-all.

His fowls, he thought, lacked vitamins, so he gave them concentrated vitamins, again in a most expensive form, in the hope that they would lay if only in gratitude. Then he gave them artificial sunlight and all manner of marvellous encouragements, but all to little or no effect.

Slowly he realised that cattle and pigs and poultry, like the rest of creation, come in two categories, good and bad. He had bought "economically" and paid accordingly. Now he is realising, still slowly, that qualified stockmen cannot be hired at the farm labourer's wage of 30s. a week, and that even his dynamic energy, enterprise, and enthusiasm cannot get the profit

out of a thousand-acre farm and its divers sidelines without skilled assistance.

So with the passage of years the farm shows signs of approaching its old productivity. Perhaps it may one day far surpass it. Meanwhile a local old farmer who "knows" estimates that his progressive neighbour has invested £20,000 and already lost a third of it.

I thought my new neighbour unique in his folly as in his enterprise, but I find he is one of a host. Poor old British agriculture!

THE FARMER'S BOY

Revised Version.

THE sun had set behind the hill
When full of erudition,
To a farmer's door a young man came,
For it was his ambition
To use his D.Sc. (Agric.)
And all his brains employ,
To cultivate and rusticate
And be a farmer's boy-oy-oy!
And be a farmer's boy!

He used the latest dynamos
For milking cows and shearing,
And fitted all the heifers' tails
With epicyclic gearing,
Enabling them with greater ease
To make the flies deploy,
And teem with cream in gratitude
To such a farmer's boy-oy-oy!
To such a farmer's boy!

He sowed the superphosphates wide,
And sulphates in rotation,
To show the stupid farmer what
Was what in cultivation;

And when the ear of wheat grew up
A trifle shy and coy,
He gave it ultra-violet rays,
This clever farmer's boy-oy-oy!
This clever farmer's boy!

In every sleeping heifer's ear,
Suggestion he would mutter,
And they thereby subconsciously
Increased the yield of butter;
Thus, too, he taught the grunting pigs
Life's humour to enjoy,
And laughing, they made fatter pork
To feed the farmer's boy-oy-oy!
To feed the farmer's boy

The too-prolific aphis-fly
He soon exterminated,
By Stopesian suggestions which
He subtly inculcated;
By this same means all insect pests
He managed to destroy,
So they could neither spoil the fruit,
Nor bite the farmer's boy-oy-oy!
Nor bite the farmer's boy!

By means of Mendelism and
Skill in manipulation,
He crossed his hens with bees and through
Gametic segregation
The hens each laid a million eggs,
And bees ceased to annoy
By stinging or by buzzing round
The busy farmer's boy-oy-oy!
The busy farmer's boy!

By dint of double entry and
Much filing of petitions,
He sat with expert dignity
On many Royal Commissions:
Though farms and farmers are extinct
He tells with pride and joy,
How he went and showed them how to be
A modern farmer's boy-oy-oy!
A modern farmer's boy!

AT "THE GOLDEN POT"

LATE in the evening I came to the end of the footpath over the downs, stepped on to a hard road and found myself before the door of "The Golden Pot." As I passed under its low lintel and peered through the mist of smoke, blue as a Tyrolean haze, I saw bending over the pianist a pair of great shoulders which might well have borne the old Anchises from the flames of Troy.

Over the broad humming gossip of the village youths and ancients round the room came a kindly sonorous voice from the direction of the shoulders, half pleading and half threatening the lad at the piano. Presently I gathered that the lad insisted on playing jazz to which he of the voice and shoulders objected. He was gradually urging his objections more and more forcibly when he half turned and caught sight of me.

"Ssh——, no row now!" he cautioned the pianist in tones of awe. "There's a Scotland Yard man just come!"

Slowly and a little unsteadily he came over to me bearing aloft a half-emptied pint pot.

"Good evening," he murmured, and stood against me towering awfully, a fine great fellow.

"Do you think I am a Scotland Yard man?"

I asked, for I was not a little perturbed at such a description.

His deep, humorous blue eyes showed just the faintest smile and he lowered his great head to whisper to me:

"Hath not a Jew eyes?"

"——hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions," I continued, for I too have something of a *flair* for that sort of thing. "Then what does the Jew see?"

"You are, like myself, an artist," he answered. I bowed acknowledgment of the flattery. "Now tell me," he continued, "what would you do, what should any artist do when he hears an unholy din like that?" He indicated the altar on which a starveling melody was being cruelly butchered. And then, supplying his own answer, he snapped, "Why, give 'em something better!"

An apple-cheeked wench came over for our mugs and, smiling, left the room to replenish them. As she disappeared through the door the big fellow stood upright, showing now the strange incongruity between his clean-shaven mobile face and his rough labourer's clothes. The "house" ceased chattering and looked expectant. Clearly, they knew their man. He paused for a moment, stretched an eloquent arm towards the absent girl and spoke:

"I fain would go, yet beauty calls me back:
To leave her so, and not once say farewell,
Were to transgress against all laws of love.
But, if I use such ceremonious thanks
As parting friend accustom on the shore,

Her silver arms will coil me round about,
And tears of pearl cry, 'Stay, Æneas, stay!'
Each word she says will then contain a crown
And every speech be ended with a kiss."

Never was a man so torn between love and duty. As he ended the "house" thumped applause, in which Kit Marlowe's ghost lurking in a smoke-screen behind the settle joined heartily.

"Good old Macbeth!" (for so they called him). "Give us some Shakespeare!"

He turned to me: "You see," he said softly, "they like music."

The maid had now returned, and as "Macbeth" (or was it Æneas?) took a draught from his pot, I dimly remembered the great god Thor and his attempt to drain the mighty horn whose end was in the sea.

He paused for breath, and the house waited again. He could not disappoint them:

"Now mark me, how I will undo myself
I give this heavy weight from off my head——"

(I thought he was holding a pint pot, but he laid a royal crown upon the table!)

"And this unwieldy Sceptre from my hand
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart
With mine own tears I wash away my balm. . . ."

I did my best with Northumberland. It seemed easy then—and there. By the time he ended, having smashed a photograph which I

unconsciously handed him from the top of the piano when he commanded :

" A mirror hither straight
That it may show me what a face I have
Since it is bankrupt of its majesty "

and turned me from Northumberland to Bolingbroke when he addressed me :

" Mark, silent king, the moral of this sport—
How soon my sorrow hath destroyed my face "

—every man of the company felt the tragedy of kingship, and some of them, I fancied, of him who was even now ruling their emotions. But they were wrong. For him, here was no tragedy but triumph.

Then we fell to talking of London and the people there. He inquired, a little incoherently now, of many people—Forbes-Robertson, Du Maurier, James Douglas, John Hassall, and a host of others. He was much concerned to know whether Gilbert Chesterton had grown more or less like Dr. Johnson, and then he spoke of the Old Vic and " the divine Sybil."

He catalogued, as well as he could in his blissful state, the famous theatres and capitals in which he had played, " but here," he said at last with a sweep of that arm again, " here is *my* audience! "

The innkeeper called " Time, gen'men, please! " and we all trooped out under the stars. Suddenly a yokel asked, " Wur's Macbeth? " and another, " Fetch 'im out somebody! " " Who's takin' 'im 'ome? "

I went back to seek him in the inn and bid him good night. I found my Macbeth, alias Æneas, alias King Richard, there alone with Dido who had, despite the law, newly filled his goblet.

Whether she was saying beneath the shadow of those shoulders

“ For in his looks I see eternity
And he'll make me immortal. . . . ”

or he was breathing an impassioned parting

“ Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part ”

I cannot say. I only know there was no third alternative.

THE SIMPLE LIFE

I ALWAYS hated towns. That is why, after the War, I acted on the common fallacy that the simple, sweet, idyllic life is to be found in the English countryside.

In one of Nature's own gardens in the heart of Hampshire I found a cottage and a few acres at the bottom of a rambling lane decked with eglantine, hazel, and may. There I resolved to live the simple life and be nationally useful by feeding myself and my family and producing food for others, in return for which I should obtain clothing and necessities. There I would do a man's work, healthy and open, to the tune of the wind in the trees, the lowing of fat comfortable cows, the chirrup of birds and the rattle of harness to a deep-chested "Whoa—up!" And for my leisure I would have my books, and a down to stride over.

Vegetable-growing and poultry-keeping were to be the main work in my Eden. A goat or two for milk, a dog and a cat, and of course the inevitable pig, completed the regular population.

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But a vegetable garden happens to need most attention in the chicken-rearing season, and the post of foster-father to a few thousand downy

chicks is no sinecure. It leaves little time for sleep—not to mention gardening.

Then I found that to rear chickens and obtain enough profit to buy other necessities at town prices one must resort to mass-production. That means using incubators and rearing-stoves, which demand a knowledge of thermodynamics and embriology. If I am to breed the super-hens which alone can lay eggs fast enough for the hectic competition of these days, I must study Mendelism and the intricacies of heterozygotes, chromosomes, and L2 factors. If I am to feed anything successfully, even the pig, the pundits and economic circumstances combine to insist that I shall unravel the mysteries of carbohydrates, proteins, and Water Soluble C.

When, as the result of this research and Herculean labours, I manage to produce something to sell, I need the business acumen of a stock-broker if I am to save the thinnest margin of profit from the hordes of middlemen and higglers who thrive on me and my kind. My alternative is to lose the profit in the disproportionate rail and cartage charges on my small quantities of produce.

I must be my own dustman, plumber, carpenter, and policeman. When anything is wanted for the house, it is, of course, miles away. Every drop of water must be pumped up laboriously. Think of this, you who turn on a tap for water and telephone for everything else.

When at long last, *in my spare time*, I thought to enjoy a ramble in the lanes and listen to the

birds, I found that the lane hedges had already been hacked down to make room for railings and ugly telephone poles, reared at fantastic angles which make the view a post-futurist nightmare. All other sounds are drowned by the "chunchunt" of a neighbouring farmer's milking machine and the clatter of his ploughing tractor. When these are silent there is his pumping engine or the roar of aeroplanes from the local flying school.

Now, when I can, I take a nice restful holiday within easy reach of Ludgate Circus.

THE VILLAGE

MY village is of course quite unlike every other village—and in that it is exactly like every other village that ever is or was. Every village is either the prettiest, the oldest, the most scattered, the hilliest, the healthiest or the dullest. My village, too, has its boast as well as its church and its inn. And its boast is that it is all these things.

Or it *was* a few years ago when I first hobbled into it, out of the War. It had its groups of low, thick-walled, comfortable homes, creepered and thatched. It had its riotous lanes, rambling through all three dimensions at once as if some ancient had planned them on a holiday ; lanes decked with wild unruly hedgerows on that first mad May morning that I saw them. And there is not a flat furlong or a straight stride in the whole parish.

Now and then an old labourer would dig up a flint implement or a coin to confirm the obvious, misty antiquity of the place. There would be chatter about Britons and Romans and of how the cobbler's name was in Domesday Book—the carpenter's son, who had won a scholarship and is now a professor, had said so.

Under the great old yews in the churchyard,

the few mossy tombstones (for few people die here) showed no deaths under eighty unless by accident. And after dark there was never a waking soul in the place—except a lover's.

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Now hideous iron bungalows have sprung up like weeds among the thatches and all around the village. It could not be helped—the old soldiers must have somewhere to live and the bungalows were all, and often more, than a hero's wages could buy. Old Army huts are scattered about as fowl-houses—(or homes), and the hateful little Nissen huts are pigsties. The old farmer is gone and his enterprising and business-like (and less successful) successor has cut down hedges and put up barbed wire—which was cheap after the war and does not need trimming.

Old Army iron has made the smithy fit only for Cézanne to paint—or even look upon. The village hall, an old Y.M.C.A. canteen, stands gaunt across the great old elms which once traced a cathedral window against the western winter sky.

The butchers' and the bakers' traps are gone and in their place war cars and their successors rattle and hoot incessantly round the lanes, so that mothers dare not let their children out to play—the post-War children reared on iron rations and Maconochie, since business has come to the land and all the milk, butter, and eggs must go to the towns for money.

In the schoolyard, a battered, rusty old

"crump" gapes at the sky and keeps our memories of mud and blood alive.

I must not forget to mention the one old familiar thing which my village still retains. The post is a little awry and the board is cracked, but the words are still legible : "Rubbish may be shot here."

THE UNTRODDEN COUNTRY

WITHIN half an hour from London, or, for that matter, any other place, since it is about equidistant from everywhere, there is a wide and trackless country untrodden by the feet of man. There are no maps of it, for it is not only unexplored, but unexplorable, because its contours and its plan are for ever changing. It harbours neither birds, beasts, nor fishes, trees nor grass nor any mortal thing. Its rare visitors are chiefly men (who never stay more than an hour or two), and sometimes the greater birds such as eagles and vultures.

The prevailing colours of this strange yet familiar country are white and blue. Nevertheless it has an indescribable beauty of scape, and at certain times it may be steeped with glorious colour in mirific abundance of tone and chiaroscuro.

It is a tenuous and ethereal country, but not on that account less real, substantial, and beautiful to the eye of the traveller who roams its fastnesses. The journey thither, though short, is venturesome, and a great adventure when it is made for the first time, since it can only be made by aircraft.

It is the Country of the Clouds—not the little white cotton-woolly things or the drab, rainy

sweeps we see from below—but, when you are close to them, great towering mountains pierced by enormous caves and tunnels, carven as from snowy marble by the wind. As you approach these grand rolling cumuli on a fine summer's day they look so solid and formidable that the first instinctive action is to avoid crashing into them. When you do strike them, the 'plane bumps and rocks as if, after all, the cloud were as hard as it looked, but the shock is only a momentary one, due to the "pockets" or "bumps" in the air occasioned by the change of density. You find that the rock-like cloud itself is no more substantial than a thick fog.

You may travel through the great caves which pierce the massive cumulus, and explore its labyrinths, catching here and there through a hole in the "floor" a glimpse of the pale green and brown of Mother Earth dotted over with the darker green of a wood, streaked with a silver river, scored by railway lines, and here and there defaced by the smudge of a city. Overhead through a wide skylight you may look into a lake of flawless blue, infinitely deep.

On another day you may visit the Cloud Country and find it a boundless plain covering the earth like a great snowy eiderdown with the dazzling whiteness of an Arctic continent. It may be rippled like thick snow on a ploughed field, or billowy like a swelling sea, or yet rising like the wind-piled sand-hillocks of the desert. Again it may be smooth as a tablecloth and merge mistily on its far distant horizon through

fawn and opal into the deepening blue of its dome of sky. On such a day as this, if you fly from the sun, skimming the cloud plain, you may be lucky enough to see the deep shadow of your machine set in a small but perfectly circular rainbow of quite unearthly brilliance.

Of the passionate fire and caressing softness of the sunsets to be seen from cloudland it were profane to speak as of the heart secrets of a lover. They are not seen so much as felt, as, indeed, is the awesomeness of everything in this enchanted country.

At night, if low drifting cirrus clouds are abroad, you may meet in the faint light which permeates this country, even when the earth is darkest, the thin, wispy ghosts which are its only inhabitants. And as they drift by you may see, above and below, galaxies of a myriad twinkling lights, the lamps of Heaven and—London.

DISTRIBUTISM & AGRICULTURE

THE reader has, no doubt, already asked "What is Distributism?" but not the equally important and necessary question, "What is Agriculture?" In this difference in the public attitude towards the two things lies the key to nearly all the economic problems of the modern world. It hides a profound and fundamental truth.

Everybody thinks he knows what Agriculture is and regards Distributism as a strange new theory, somewhat nebulous and probably experimental and risky.

Agriculture and Distributism are two of the oldest things in the world. They were born together and they are inseparable. When Distributism is separated from Agriculture, Agriculture is doomed to die. Agriculture is dying in England, because Distributism has no place in the economic creed of the country. Agriculture flourishes and prospers in Denmark, Ireland, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland, because Distribution dominates the economic creeds of these countries.

It is significant of the intellectual fog and chaos in modern commercial civilisation, that we feel bound to preface any consideration of problems affecting Agriculture by the restatement of a

number of simple and self-evident facts, so simple and obvious that in a healthy-minded civilisation they would be intellectually offensive. To tell a man that he must eat to live, in a normal state would be to insult his intelligence by suggesting that he did not know and believe such an obvious fact. But the reiteration of the statement is very necessary to-day, because all that is commonly called modern, up-to-date, and progressive in our civilisation, behaves as if it were not true. You have only to state, for example, a few of the necessary and logical corollaries of the fact that we must eat to live, to be told that you are medieval, reactionary, and obscurantist.

For from the fact that a man cannot live without eating it follows that food is the first thing necessary to his continued existence, that the production of food is his first and most important work. From searching for food man soon found it more economical to take a seed which had fallen upon stony ground and plant it on fertile land. By tilling, the land became more fertile and man needed to search for fewer seeds. He invented the sickle, the scythe, and the plough—tools which are as old as the history of the human race. This culture of the land, Agriculture, was man's first job.

From the fact that land is needed for the planting of seeds, and that man must have dominion over that land to develop and protect the corn whilst it is growing, man derives his right of access to the land. Since the land increases in value by the work a man expends on it, since its

increased fertility results from its acquisition of the labour of the man and his expense of thought in the exercise of that labour—in other words, since part of the man is now in the land—man has an inherent right to the land which thus contains something of himself, the right of ownership. And this is the fundamental fact of Distributism.

Thus it is that Agriculture and Distributism are equally old and equally necessary to man.

Everything goes to show that in the most modern “progressive” state of our civilisation, as exhibited in Capitalist, industrialised countries, Agriculture is considered in practice the least important instead of the most important of human activities.

The millions of London and New York are increasing annually. They are millions engaged in buying and selling, book-keeping, recording, transporting, and organising, but none of them in producing food. Unless they are fed none of them can do any of their presumably more important jobs. Yet the man who feeds them in England recently asked for a minimum wage of 30s. a week—*lower than any other labourer receives*—and he was refused!

The agricultural labourer has been encouraged to leave the land and go to the towns to fill the factories. There he may work for a bare subsistence wage which he must continually fight to secure, or he may be paid a dole by the State for doing nothing, as in England, whilst the land he left lies idle, wasting the fertility which he and thousands of his forefathers gave it.

When he is fortunate enough to get work he builds ships, railways, and roads for the transport of food for which England depends on other nations, and in so defending exposes the population to starvation in war or in the event of failure on the part of the foreign feeders.

Now the economic creed which thus denies that man's first need is food, which prefers to keep its manhood doing nothing rather than producing food, which maintains its potential food producers in a state of industrial discontent or idleness or both, is called Capitalism. England was the birthplace and is still the chief home of this creed. Its central doctrine is that the most just, most moral, and most economical state is that in which property (i.e. land and the means of production) is owned and controlled by a few men, consequently rich in inverse proportion to their numbers. Its apparent, but not real, antithesis is Socialism (or in its more extreme form Communism) which does not differ from it fundamentally since it also stands for the concentration of property. It may be said to seek the logical conclusion of Capitalism by making the few owners of property fewer still to the point of zero—when there are no individual owners at all, the State being owner.

Distributism is the real antithesis of Capitalism. It seeks to destroy Capitalism by increasing the number of Capitalists. In a Distributist State property is not in the hands of a few but as many as possible, the ideal condition being that in which every man is a Capitalist in that he is

owner, of his land, his house, his tools, and as many men as possible are their own masters, receiving as much benefit as possible from their own labour. They do not receive the whole of the benefits, for the State also derives a very considerable benefit from the multiplication of small owners. And this is particularly true in Agriculture.

Two of the chief and distinguishing factors of Capitalism are mass-production and centralisation. These factors are supposed to make for simplicity of organisation and consequent economy in production. They do neither, because they depend on a number of economic fallacies. The first of these fallacies is that mass production is synonymous with intensive production.

If we consider the case of the large fruit farm of several thousand acres for the mass-production of fruit, it is a well-known fact that the amount of fruit produced per acre is much less than the amount per acre yielded by the small orchard on a small farm or smallholding. The fruit is produced with less labour, it is true—and increased unemployment. We economise in labour and then waste the labour we have saved.

Centralisation in production demands a system of decentralisation for the produce, entailing transport, selling agencies, middlemen, and organisation. When the earth yields a generous abundance of fruit, the decentralisation or distribution of the produce breaks down. The cost of decentralisation is too high in relation to the price obtainable, and vast quantities of food are

wasted whilst towns abound with destitute and starving people. Very often the mass-producer has to pay for labour to *destroy* his produce. What applies to fruit in this connection applies, though in a different manner, to vegetables, eggs, and milk.

On smaller farms and holdings, individually owned and controlled, where all kinds of food-stuffs are produced, the yield is higher. The land is more profitably employed. Under the fruit, for example, ducks and geese and poultry are run. The land is thus automatically manured, its insect pests are destroyed, and it will give a heavy yield of vegetables when being rested from livestock. The smaller quantities of surplus food can be conveniently handled by the grower and stored against scarcity.

For the past seven years the present writer has been living on a smallholding, one of a group established on what was formerly considered unprofitable land. The local landowner, who found it impossible to farm this land profitably because of the decline of Agriculture due to the taxation and overhead charges of maintaining the unproductive population under Capitalism, sold sixty acres as the poorest yielding on his farm of nearly a thousand. These sixty unproductive acres now maintain, wholly or partly, some fifteen families, despite the middlemen who take heavy toll of their profits. From these holdings a very large quantity of produce, chiefly vegetables, eggs, fruit, and honey, goes to feed the unproductive "black-coated" workers in the towns. The families

on the holdings are sturdy, healthy, and independent, worthy and fit to maintain the best traditions of English manhood and womanhood. They are taxed, directly and indirectly, out of all proportion to their earnings, but their mode of living is so economically sound that they can still carry on. They can obtain little or no redress for their political grievances because a Capitalist Government is not primarily concerned with Agriculture. It has taken years of desperate fighting, for example, to gain a decision, for purposes of taxation, that a fowl is an animal and that poultry farming is husbandry !

The sixty acres which once grudgingly yielded a poor crop of barley now carries orchards, fowls, cows, goats, pigs, stocks of bees, and several large glass-houses for tomato growing. And by the increase in all these things England is the richer.

Under the Distributist system of individually owned mixed farms, all the local workers are supplied with their various provisions on the spot. Thus a vast amount of the machinery of transport and organisation necessary for the decentralisation of mass-produced food, a machinery in itself unproductive and unprofitable and therefore uneconomical, is eliminated.

The doctrine of the "Mass-Production School," "produce where the products can be most economically produced," stands on the local economy of labour in mass-production and ignores the fact that labour saved on the spot in mass-production is either unemployed or expended

elsewhere in distribution of produce. As Fr. Vincent McNabb has so often insisted, it implies the prime fallacy that production is an end in itself. Production is only a means, *the end is consumption*. The doctrine should be "produce where the products can be most economically consumed"—which is the doctrine of Distributism.

As we have already observed, Capitalism was born in England and flourishes in England as it does nowhere else in the world. Taxes are higher and unemployment is greater in England than anywhere else in the world. We can buy excellent imported food in England cheaper than home-grown—not because the foreign cow yields more butter than the English, the foreign hen more eggs or foreign land is more fertile, for the exact contrary is the case—English livestock is unsurpassed; it is not because it takes more labour to milk a cow or plough a field in England—it is because Capitalism is uneconomical and because the Distributist system is so profitable that Distributist countries can afford to sell their surplus food very cheaply.

The industrialisation of England under Capitalism, extending to Agriculture, has resulted in an unprecedented decline in Agriculture. Large tracts of fertile land are being underfarmed or not farmed at all. Under Distributism they would be split up and made accessible to small farmers and smallholders. Capitalism and industrialisation have made the position of England's squires and yeomen intolerable. It was these squires and yeomen who laid the foundations of

England's greatness. All this was done in the days before the blight of Capitalism fell on our green and pleasant land. It will be undone unless we can shake ourselves free of the parasite and stamp on it.

The real truth of the matter lies, of course, deeper than all this business of economics. Man has a body and soul, an individuality, rights and a dignity born of the fact that he is made in the image of God. Capitalism regards man as material on the labour market, as a cog in a machine and many more soulless things of the same nature. In that Capitalism is immoral, and so we find, as we might so expect, that the principles of Distributism are found nowhere so well defined and strongly advocated as in the Catholic Church—in the philosophy of the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas, and in our own day very admirably expressed in the famous encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, "*Rerum Novarum*."

Those who would like to see the land all in the possession of the State or of the Big Benevolent Boss, leaving the mass of the nation propertyless, and consequently without rights or powers of disposing of their own labour, are very fond of the argument that their system is right because civilisation is tending that way, because the concentration of property and the centralisation of power is the logical outcome of our civilisation—if we accept the widespread and indiscriminate application of the doctrines of evolutionists.

If we may judge from their utterances, their chief and apparently only argument against

Distributism consists of a monotonous repetition of the statement that Distributists are "reactionary and want to go back to the Middle Ages."

Reason and logic failing them they can only deny Distributism by an attempt to justify its antithesis of Capitalism and Big Business in Agriculture on the ground that these modern things are "progressive" and in the natural course of progressive evolution of the human race and its civilisation. "Towards what?" is a question which they prefer to leave unanswered. They say, in effect, that what is recent is, *ipso facto*, better than what is past. It is, of course, stupid to ask why.

So a State which was once healthy and is now sick unto death must not be restored to its former health because sickness, being more recent, is a better thing than health.

So a man who has taken a wrong turning on a journey may not retrace his steps to get on the right road again, he may not even consider the sun or the stars and take the footpath through cornfields and commons to regain his road further on! To save him from such folly the true Progressive and Capitalist seizes the cornfield and the common, covers it with factories, and erects the notice "No Road." From the factory he will generously provide the strayed and hungry man with a motor-car (but no food) to speed him on the road to—well, it does not matter where so long as he goes further. For it is a "progressive" axiom that he cannot go further and fare worse.

If you believe in the Capitalist conception of progress you must either believe all this or believe that man was never sick and never made a mistake.

Alternatively again, of course, you may find a prime lie somewhere.

ON SMALLHOLDINGS

ALL political parties, even in an age when they behave as if they have ample justification for the extension of industrialism and the neglect of agriculture, carry about as a sort of talisman a land programme. None of the land programmes of the Governments of the past hundred years have been of any earthly use—except, perhaps, as vote traps. But they would have been of little use even for that unless they had included special provision for the smallholder—provision to facilitate the purchase of smallholdings.

Here is a curious testimony to the inherent right of a man to the cultivation of land and its corollary in the ownership of the land he cultivates, as well as his desire to exercise that right.

The desire for the simple life in which a man may possess his own cottage and plot of land, living as his own master by the fruit of his own toil and soil, is very strong indeed. Deep in almost every townsman's heart there is a longing for the natural country life, for independence and rural content. This longing is the softened call of the wild, the voice of Mother Earth calling men back to their Mother, to the life from which

they have sprung and from which they have been uprooted.

Yet despite this call and the legislation effected to enable men to answer it, for example the various smallholdings and Allotment Acts from 1908 to the present day, there has been no really considerable return to the land and no effective increase of prosperous smallholdings. The main reason is that politicians find it sufficient for their purpose to admit the principle in their proposals and legislation and they are not practically concerned with the ultimate application of the principle.

The most recent legislation, the Smallholdings and Allotments Act of 1926, provides for the easy purchase of smallholdings and cottage holdings by farm labourers and others engaged in rural industries. It even generously provides for State assistance to cover the losses of local authorities in the application of the Act. But this does not in any way encourage a *return* to the land. Nor does it offer any protection to the smallholder against the economic forces fostered against him. He is still left at the mercy of middlemen, manipulated markets, disproportionate transport costs, and taxation which penalises his industry.

The general idea in political circles seems to be that if you dump a man and his family in the middle of a few acres (which probably nobody else can farm) you have done all that is necessary to make them independent, happy, prosperous, and productive.

The suspension of the Smallholdings Act during the War was followed by special provision made during and after the War whereby ex-service men were provided with holdings.

Here was a magnificent opportunity for the State. The War had taught us the importance of producing as much food as possible at home. Economists emphasise this importance. In no branch of Agriculture is food produced more economically and intensively than on a smallholding. The independent smallholder works without a clock. He knows that he is working for himself and his family, that his profit is his own and does not go into the pockets of an employer (though it may and often does go into the pockets of the parasitic middlemen). He has to choose between working as long as need be or failure to maintain himself as a free man. He values his independence and finds it worth while to work and make it secure.

At the end of the War there was a rush for smallholdings by the right sort of men—fighters. The War had released these men from the confinement of cities and set them to live in camps with “the wind on the heath,” giving them wide visions of the depth and the expanse of sky, and permitting them for a little while at least to draw the bolt of Nature’s secrecies. They heard the call which town-bred men rarely hear until they live and sleep under the open sky. Those who had courage and whose souls had not already succumbed to the enervating atmosphere of the cities vowed never to return to the old life.

The purchasing power of these ex-service smallholders' war gratuities and pensions was much magnified through the telescopes of their enthusiasm. It is not less regrettable than true that because the nation is not seriously interested in the production of food and the preservation of manhood, it wasted this excellent opportunity. The men fought their new battle of peace manfully and most of them have failed. They are now back in the cities, increasing the congestion and drawing the dole. Smallholdings are ten a penny and most of them are the graves of ex-soldiers' hopes, health, and savings.

Is it worth nothing to the State to encourage such men to produce good food cheaply (often from poor land), to live healthy, contented lives and rear sturdy children, even if these last be nothing more than cannon fodder for the next war?

It will not be easy to find another such opportunity of distributing the population and increasing smallholding food production.

"Progress" during the past century has never been really concerned with getting people back to the land, but rather with dragging them from it and keeping them from going back. "Progress" has succeeded, because it "softens" men and also because it effectively deprives them of the means of returning. A man does not need *means*, of course, to return to the land and be a farm labourer. But the idea of any considerable number of factory hands returning to the life of farm labourers now sounds merely ludicrous.

And so it is. The only form of country life which can attract the town-dweller is the life in which he might live as an independent smallholder or peasant proprietor.

The city strives to keep him from this by making him accustomed to and dependent on "modern conveniences" and the illusive security of a regular wage with, generally speaking, none of the responsibilities entailed by the ownership of the means of producing the wages. Town life has destroyed or doped the spirit of independence by which a man knows himself to be a man.

The restriction of wages is another factor increasing the difficulty of a return to the simple life because the wage-earner can rarely accumulate the very necessary capital for the purchase and stocking of a holding. And town life militates against the natural desire even further by providing a ready means of dissipation of wages.

It is not true, of course, that all town-dwelling workers consciously crave for the smallholding life. For many of them, town life has long ago quelled their natural desires and the only remaining spark flickers feebly in the general exodus to the country on holidays.

Nevertheless, peasant ownership has become an ideal for many in whom the pace and stress of town-life has produced its inevitable reaction. And since the simple life has become an ideal and a shuttlecock of controversy for political idealists, it has, with the unfortunate erring weakness of all ideals, begun to fade from the realms of practicality. It has come to be regarded as something

which is very nice in theory but impossible in practice; a thing to be praised and avoided, like most virtues.

To a very large extent this modern attitude towards a return to the simple life is reasonable and understandable, but it does not on that account cease to be deplorable. Modern economic conditions in this country render any "back to the land" movement on the part of the masses almost an impossibility. Even for the few who are bold enough to make the venture it is a movement fraught with very great risk. But it is worth the risk. Perhaps that is why it continues to call in spite of "Progress," and there are still times when the choice lying between industrial "security" and independent responsibility, the simple life wins.

It is reckoned reactionary to decry the type of "Progress" in civilisation of which industrialisation seems to be a necessary (and evil) concomitant. Modern manufacturing methods, the results of applied science, have helped to provide for the increasing population. They have given a certain measure of happiness by making articles of food and clothing more easily accessible to the poor *which they have created*, and they have made extensive travel possible for the edification and pleasure of those *who can afford it*.

Nevertheless it is very doubtful whether the hives of industry can contribute to the happiness or the growth of man to anything like the extent of the simple life, which renders most of the activity of Science so much waste time for the

simple-lifer who can live to be a hundred and die contented and sage in unscientific simplicity.

As far as the smallholder is concerned, Science has taken heavy payment for the service she may have rendered. She has given us mechanised farming which has made the continued existence of the smallholder more difficult by placing the apparatus of cultivation out of the reach of the man of small capital. She has reduced the production of that most healthful and soul-comforting oil, the sweat of the brow, which has hitherto been essential to farming and the simple life. She has increased the economic difficulties of the smallholder.

But the call of the country is not easily stifled. It has a note of confidence and promise and the simple life is still possible. Its passing will not be in our generation.

